



Instructor Portrait: Emily Good, Geography & Environmental Studies

After portraying two senior faculty members last year, this edition of the CTL Bulletin introduces a full-time instructor, Emily Good, who has been at NEIU for the last twelve years. Emily received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and her Master's degree in Geography & Environmental Studies from NEIU. After teaching two years in Australia's public schools, she came to Chicago and began a career in publishing starting as a freelance writer and eventually ending up as General Manager and Publisher of the Student Publishing Company at Northwestern University. Emily has taught many Gen-Ed classes as well as upper level courses. Teaching has always been her passion. One of her principal interests is promoting geography education for K-12 teachers and their students. She considers college teaching "the best job in the world."

What have been your experiences teaching students in General Education courses?

I have heard the life stories of many of our students, and I admire all the things they do and how they make things work. They tend to have complex lives and juggle many responsibilities. To meet the traditional college demands is much harder for them than it is for the typical full-time students at residential campuses. But our students have the desire to learn, so we ought to give them what they need most, and that starts with the necessary thinking and writing skills to succeed in the working world. The lecture hall method of teaching is not the ideal way of teaching those skills. Students don't "sit and absorb." They need active learning and interaction that engages them with the material and with each other. My experience teaching general education courses over the years has shown me that many of our entering students don't have the reading and comprehension skills or even the basic knowledge to follow a lecture. At the 300-level I find students who still have difficulties extracting relevant information from readings and other materials and expressing a well-founded opinion about what they have read. If we want students to retain the knowledge they are learning, they need more opportunities to apply that information in appropriate exercises beyond the usual assessments of research papers and exams.

What are your thoughts about General Education: Should it be changed from what it is today?

The ideal solution would be to bring students up to speed before they start in Gen-Ed. That's probably an unrealistic expectation. Short of that, I'd recommend making classes small enough that frequent writing can be assigned, where students learn to summarize and express themselves in a logical fashion. My students read newspaper articles, write one-paragraph summaries and give short opinion statements. After five iterations of this by mid semester I begin to see some improvements. Students need to learn how to think about what the article says and to summarize it without plagiarizing. It's unfortunate that so many

aren't ready for this when they enter college, but we have to address students' needs if we want them to succeed. Having students read newspapers makes class relevant because the concepts are not abstract textbook knowledge but material from the real world, maybe even from their own neighborhoods. And I like to stress the importance of being an informed citizen. I focus on short papers and field work assignments that teach students how to capture important information and utilize it to form logical opinions of their own.

What's the role of instructors in your department?

The instructors' role in our department has improved markedly over the years. It started with the previous chair inviting all four full-time instructors to the department meetings (part-timers rarely have the time). Even though we cannot vote, we now participate in all regular meetings, and we teach courses at all levels. For the last couple of years, our program has been overhauling its curriculum course by course. We've been meeting as often as once a week, and the four of us have been playing a role in this process. I believe instructors in our department have a good working relationship with the rest of the faculty.

How satisfied are you with your work as an instructor at NEIU?

I absolutely enjoy the challenge of preparing young adults for their professional and personal well being. Because of their various professional experiences outside of the university instructors bring a perspective to teaching that can enhance the academic environment. As for the instructor's lot at NEIU, we now are eligible for comprehensive benefits, excellence awards and sabbaticals which are appreciated. For those of us where the job is a second career after having served in other professional capacities, the salary is perhaps less of an issue than recognition of our contributions, especially when we have been here for many years. That said, ultimately, all faculty members have the obligation to teach our students well, and if we do so, we should be compensated accordingly.

In your twelve years in higher education, what do you see as the most significant changes that have occurred?

As a geographer with a spatial perspective on education, it is evident to me that we need to provide programs that prepare students to compete in the global market place. There is a world of problems that need solving and higher education should provide the essential resources so our students can go on to lead productive lives. Two significant changes that have occurred are the delivery of information using the Internet and the implementation of on-line learning. The access to real-time knowledge has given us so many new and exciting opportunities, and it is our duty to help students learn how to use and evaluate these resources responsibly.

What role do you see for instructors in higher education in the coming decade?

The most important reason for having instructors in higher education is to bring people from the field into the classroom. Our students can benefit from exposure to teaching professionals who have held jobs outside of academia and know what skills it takes to navigate through life. The model of hiring instructors merely as cheap labor is a false economy. When money is the issue, instructors can not dedicate as much time and effort as our students need for consistent instruction. Of course, anybody engaged in higher education needs to have teaching skills. Subject-matter expertise and enthusiasm are not enough. There are many professionals who are retiring from their career and would like to share their knowledge with young people. The concept of a faculty should be inclusive, drawing from many walks of life.